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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001613

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: HAMAS RAIDS CENTRAL ELECTIONS OFFICE IN GAZA, TWICE
REF: JERUSALEM 699

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Hamas Executive Force twice raided the Central Elections Commission's (CEC) Gaza branch August 26-28, removing three staff members for off-site interrogation, confiscating the cellular phone of one staff member, and seizing keys to the CEC's Gaza warehouse to conduct an "inventory." Elections contacts familiar with the raids said Hamas may have misinterpreted a routine records disposal as preparation for elections. End Summary.

¶2. (C) CEC Chief Electoral Officer Hisham Kuhail told Poloff on August 28 that Hamas Executive Force officers entered CEC's Gaza office on August 25 and again on August 27, seeking information about CEC's activities. Both Kuhail and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Country Director Vladimir Pran attributed Hamas' interest to the "routine" destruction of old voter registration applications at all CEC offices. Pran said the destruction, by burning, apparently drew the attention of Hamas officials. The destroyed forms were carbon copies of several-year-old voter registration applications, the originals of which are archived in Ramallah.

¶3. (C) Kuhail said Hamas forces "went in quietly and left quietly." During the first visit on August 25, Hamas took three staff members off-site for questioning and seized the cellular phone of another staff member, telling him to appear for questioning on August 31. On August 27, Hamas officials seized keys to the CEC warehouse in Gaza, and told staff they intended to inventory the contents. Kuhail said no sensitive materials are stored in the warehouse, but expressed concern that Hamas may confiscate the five CEC vans parked at the warehouse. Hamas told CEC they would return the warehouse keys o/a August 29. Hamas returned the cellular phone previously seized and informed the staff member that he is not required to appear for further questioning.

¶4. (C) IFES' Pran told Poloff August 26 that he believed CEC "got itself on Hamas' radar" by sending five Gaza staff members to attend a IFES technical training course in the West Bank in May. (Note: IFES is a USAID-funded organization providing technical assistance to the CEC. End note.) In April, Hamas issued a statement prohibiting CEC from operating in Gaza, saying "elections are an affair which requires political agreement and harmony" (reftel). Pran said Hamas likely misinterpreted the routine activities as preparation for an election and dispatched officials to investigate.

WALLES